

Parenting Tips and Links

Let's Talk About...Talking to kids about sex.

Take An Active Role In The Sex Education Of Your Child

Helping a child to grow up to be a responsible, sexually healthy adult is one of our greatest challenges. But if you take an active role, you can meet that challenge. Research shows that teens are less likely to have sex at an early age, if they feel close to their parents and if their parents clearly communicate their values.^{1,2} Surveys also show that young people actually *want* to talk with their parents about tough issues like sex. They say they listen to parents more than anyone else about these issues.³

Think of Yourself as your Child's Coach in the Big Game of Life

You know the rules of the game. You know what's important.

- **Look for opportunities.** A good coach takes every opportunity to build a player's skills. Be alert to what your children are saying to each other. Use TV shows, movies, or advertisements to bring up subjects. Use any opportunity to find out what they really know, teach them, and let them know how you feel.
 - **Know what else they are learning.** Do you know what is in the curriculum at school? Who is teaching human sexuality? Is it a trained, certified health educator? What else is being taught in faith communities or youth groups?
 - **Be prepared to respond.** A good coach is ready for any question. There are many resources that can help you learn and prepare. Visit the websites below. Explore libraries or bookstores. There are whole sections on parenting, sexuality and relationships. Talk to friends, other parents, and religious leaders. Remember, a good coach gets help when they need it.
 - **Pick your time and place.** Choose a time and place that is relaxed and gives you some privacy, especially for in-depth conversations. When you are saying good night is a good time.
 - **Keep lines of communication open.** A good coach is always "ask-able." It's okay to be embarrassed. This is very personal information. What's important is to be open, so that your kids feel comfortable and safe talking with you about sensitive issues. When they do, be honest. And remember, it's usually more important *to listen* than to talk.
 - **Practice, Practice, Practice.** Don't just have "the one big talk." Young people need lots of opportunities to learn about life. Start early. Expect to talk with your child about sex for most of your life. If you mess up, there will always be another chance to do it again.
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The Three R's of Sexuality Education for Parents

Respect

Respect means different things to different people. Your teen or pre-teen is learning this too.

Tell them that you expect them to respect others. Explain what you mean by this. Make sure they understand your family rules about privacy, physical touching, or using sexual terms in jokes or name-calling.

Responsibility

Helping young people find the balance between freedom and responsibility takes time and effort. They need to learn that there are things that they cannot do until they are mature enough. They need enough life experience to handle the consequences of their actions.

Teens need to hear how to deal with their sexual feelings in ways that fit your family's values. Be clear and consistent about what you expect of them. They will not know that on their own. They may be resistant because of what they see their friends doing or what they see in the media. It's okay to say, "Our values are different. This is how we do things in our family."

Role Model

Whether we like it or not, we are the role models for our children. They learn about love, sex and relationships from the adults in their lives. What is important is how we deal with feelings, disagreements, anger and mistakes. Model for your children and teen what mature people do. If you need help, get it.

Resources

Can We Talk Rhode Island? A group helping parents talk with preteens about difficult issues. Offered throughout the State. Click on Topic Search above and scroll down Communication. Or visit the national [Can We Talk?](#) website.

Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children About Sex and Character by Domenic Cappello and Pepper Schwartz. Hyperion Publisher, New York, 2000. Or visit the [Ten Talks](#) website.

Period by JoAnn Loulan, Bonnie Lopez & Bonnie Worthen, Book Peddlers, 2001.

Where Did I Come From by Paul Walter and Peter Mayle. Offers ways to explain things. There is a version for African American families, too.

[Talking with Kids about Tough Issues](#)

[Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US \(SIECUS\)](#). Includes many resources for talking to kids of different ages.

References

¹Resnick, M.D. et al. (1997). "Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 278: 823-832.

²Blum, R.W. & Mann Rinehart, P. (1998). *Reducing the Risk: Connections that Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth*. Minneapolis, MN: Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota. pp. 16-20

³Nickelodeon, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Children Now. (1998). "Talking with kids about tough issues: A national survey of parents and kids."